



Project evaluates options to destroy M55 rockets at Blue Grass Army Depot

A Partnership for Safe Chemical Weapons Destruction

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News Release

RICHMOND, Ky. --The recent rocket motor propellant fires at chemical weapons destruction facilities in Oregon and Arkansas have caused officials at the Blue Grass Chemical-Agent Destruction Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) project to reassess current plans for destroying M55 rockets at the Blue Grass Army Depot.

"While the current design for the neutralization plant calls for the same type of rocket shear equipment in use at the incineration facilities, we are exploring alternatives to reduce the risk of possible similar incidents occurring once the Blue Grass plant becomes operational," said Jim Fritsche, government site project manager.

As a risk reduction effort, the project team is now evaluating the separation of rocket warheads and motors and processing the rocket motors in another facility on the depot. The team will identify the recommended technology and approach to separate rocket motors (which contain propellant) from warheads (which contain nerve agent) and recommended method for destroying and disposing of the rocket motors and propellant. This effort will be executed as a "project within a project" with a dedicated team drawn from Bechtel Parsons Blue Grass supplemented by Blue Grass Army Depot personnel and others as needed. The current plan is to finalize the design in 2005 and initiate operations in late 2006.

"This effort is our top priority," said Chris Midgett, project manager for Bechtel Parsons Blue Grass. "As part of the evaluation we will submit a design for government approval. Upon approval, we will go into the fabrication and construction phase."

Prior to the recent events at Oregon and Arkansas, the concept of separating the rocket motors had been under consideration for the last several months by the project design team as a way of improving operations and reducing overall cost. It will now be pursued more vigorously as a potential risk reduction measure.

In addition to the technical aspects, the public will play a key role.

"Public participation will be a critical element of the decision-making process," said Fritsche. "We also will be working with stakeholder groups such as the Kentucky Chemical Destruction Community Advisory Board, state regulators, elected officials and others."

Fritsche and Midgett emphasized the government and contractor's commitment to safety.

"Our goal has always been to reduce the risk of the chemical weapons to the community. We are confident that as we develop solutions to destroying these obsolete weapons, we will make Madison County a safer place to live and work," they said.

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